

Amendments to the Claims

1-50. (canceled)

51. (currently amended) A method of a client terminal downloading requested data via a client-server communications network which includes a server and at least one proxy server client having a local cache for storing data downloaded via the network, the method comprising:

selecting a first address from the a proxy list which comprises an address for at least one proxy server client at which requested data is cached;

pinging a first proxy server client corresponding to the selected first address to assess a connection speed to the first proxy server client; and

downloading requested data from the local cache of the first proxy server client to the client terminal if the connection speed to the first proxy server client meets a predetermined criterion.

52. (previously presented) A method according to claim 51, further comprising:

selecting a second address from the proxy list;

pinging a second proxy server client corresponding to the selected second address to assess a connection speed to the second proxy server client;

comparing the connection speed to the first proxy server client and the connection speed to the second proxy server client; and

downloading requested data from the local cache of the proxy server client with the fastest connection speed to the client terminal.

53. (previously presented) A method according to claim 51, further comprising:

pinging a second proxy server client whose address is not on the proxy list to assess a connection speed to the second proxy server client; and

downloading requested data from the local cache of the second proxy server

client to the client terminal if the connection speed to the second proxy server client meets a target connection speed.

54. (previously presented) A method according to claim 51, further comprising:  
maintaining a look-up table which correlates items of data with addresses of one or more proxy server clients at which the items of data are cached;  
assessing connection speeds to the one or more proxy server clients whose addresses are contained in the look-up table; and  
discarding or demoting the addresses of proxy server clients having relatively slow connection speeds.

55. (previously presented) A method according to claim 54, further comprising:  
pinging the one or more proxy server clients whose addresses are contained in the look-up table to assess connection speeds;  
comparing the connection speeds of the pinged proxy server clients with each other or with a target threshold speed; and  
discarding or demoting the addresses of proxy server clients having relatively slow connection speeds or that do not meet the target threshold speed.

56. (previously presented) A method according to claim 54, further comprising:  
receiving cache status change reports from the one or more proxy server clients at which the items of data are cached.

57. (previously presented) A method according to claim 51, wherein the predetermined criterion comprises a target connection speed.

58. (previously presented) A method according to claim 51, wherein the proxy list further comprises an address of the server.

59. (previously presented) A method according to claim 58, further comprising:  
pinging the server corresponding to the server address to assess a connection speed to the server;  
comparing the connection speed to the first proxy server client and the connection speed to the server; and  
downloading requested data from the local cache of the first proxy server client to the client terminal when the connection speed to the first proxy server client is faster than the connection speed to the server.
60. (previously presented) A method according to claim 51, wherein the network comprises the Internet, the at least one proxy server client comprises a user terminal running a web browser, and the respective local cache is associated with the web browser on the user terminal.
61. (previously presented) A method according to claim 51, further comprising:  
storing the address of the proxy server client that provided requested data; and  
assembling an address list of proxy server clients most commonly accessed to obtain requested data.
62. (previously presented) A method according to claim 51, further comprising:  
monitoring workload of one or more proxy server clients; and  
contacting only proxy server clients whose workload meets a workload limit.
63. (previously presented) A client-server communications network comprising:  
a server; and  
a plurality of clients connected to the server and including (i) at least one proxy server client having a local cache for storing data downloaded via the network and (ii) a requesting client having a proxy list comprising an address for at least one proxy server client at which requested data is cached, wherein the requesting client includes means for

selecting an address from the proxy list, means for pinging a selected proxy server client corresponding to the selected address to assess a connection speed to the selected proxy server client, and means for downloading requested data from the local cache of the selected proxy server client to the requesting client if the connection speed to the selected proxy server client meets a predetermined criterion.

64. (previously presented) A network according to claim 63, wherein the requesting client further includes means for recording assessed connection speeds to each selected proxy server client, means for comparing the recorded connection speeds, and means for downloading requested data from the local cache of the proxy server client with the fastest recorded connection speed.

65. (previously presented) A network according to claim 63, wherein the predetermined criterion comprises a target connection speed.

66. (previously presented) A network according to claim 63, wherein the requesting client further includes means for maintaining a look-up table which correlates items of data with addresses of one or more proxy server clients at which the items of data are cached, means for assessing connection speeds to the one or more proxy server clients whose addresses are contained in the look-up table, and means for discarding or demoting the addresses of proxy server clients having relatively slow connection speeds.

67. (previously presented) A network according to claim 66, wherein the requesting client further includes means for pinging the one or more proxy server clients whose addresses are contained in the look-up table to assess connection speeds, means for comparing the connection speeds of the pinged proxy server clients with each other or with a target threshold speed, and means for discarding or demoting the addresses of proxy server clients having relatively slow connection speeds or that do not meet the target threshold speed.

68. (previously presented) A network according to claim 66, wherein the one or more proxy server clients include means for reporting changes in their cache status to the requesting client.

69. (previously presented) A network according to claim 63, wherein each proxy server client includes means for preventing the proxy server client from serving requests that exceed a workload limit.

70. (previously presented) A network according to claim 63, wherein the requesting client further includes means for monitoring workload of at least one proxy server client, and means for contacting only proxy server clients whose workload meets a workload limit.

71. (previously presented) A network according to claim 63, wherein the network comprises the Internet, the at least one proxy server client comprises a user terminal running a web browser, and the respective local cache is associated with the browser on the user terminal.

72. (previously presented) A client terminal comprising:  
means for selecting at least one of a plurality of proxy server clients from which requested data can be downloaded;  
means for pinging a selected proxy server client to assess a connection speed to the selected proxy server client; and  
means for downloading requested data from the selected proxy server client to the client terminal if the connection speed to the selected proxy server client meets a predetermined criterion.

73. (previously presented) A client terminal according to claim 72, wherein the means for selecting selects from a proxy list comprising respective addresses of the plurality of proxy server clients.

74. (previously presented) A client terminal according to claim 73, further comprising means for recording assessed connection speeds to each selected proxy server clients, means for comparing the recorded connection speeds, and means for downloading requested data from the proxy server client with the fastest recorded connection speed.

75. (previously presented) A client terminal according to claim 72, wherein the predetermined criterion comprises a target connection speed.

76. (previously presented) A client terminal according to claim 73, further comprising means for maintaining a look-up table which correlates items of data with addresses of one or more proxy server clients at which the items of data are cached, means for assessing connection speeds to the one or more proxy server clients whose addresses are contained in the look-up table, and means for discarding or demoting the addresses of proxy server clients having relatively slow connection speeds.

77. (previously presented) A client terminal according to claim 76, further comprising means for pinging the one or more proxy server clients whose addresses are contained in the look-up table to assess connection speeds, means for comparing the connection speeds of the pinged proxy server clients with each other or with a target threshold speed, and means for discarding or demoting the addresses of proxy server clients having relatively slow connection speeds or that do not meet the target threshold speed.

78. (previously presented) A client terminal according to claim 76, further comprising means for receiving cache status change reports from the one or more proxy server clients at which the items of data are cached.

79. (previously presented) A client terminal according to claim 72, further comprising means for monitoring workload of at least one proxy server client, and means for contacting only proxy server clients whose workload meets a workload limit.

80. (previously presented) A computer-readable storage medium containing a software plug-in programmed to adapt a client terminal to perform method steps comprising:

- selecting at least one address from a proxy list comprising an address for at least one proxy server client;
- pinging a selected proxy server client corresponding to the selected address to assess a connection speed to the selected proxy server client; and
- downloading requested data from the selected proxy server client to the client terminal if the connection speed meets a predetermined criterion.